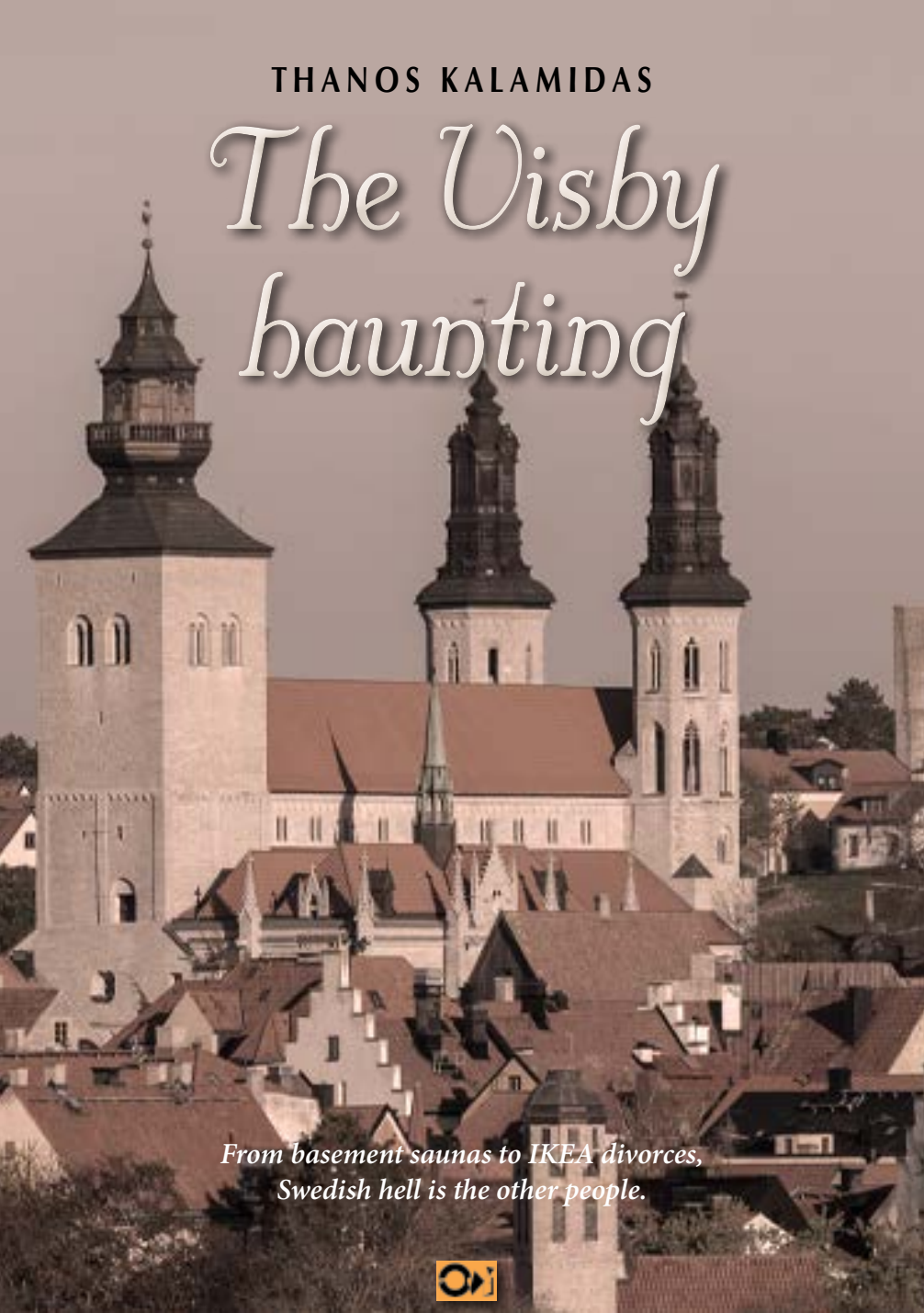
THANOS KALAMIDAS

The Visby haunting



From basement saunas to IKEA divorces,
Swedish hell is the other people.

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There are ideas that sparkle with the gleam of brilliance, like a freshly polished diamond, shining in the light of human ingenuity. And then there are ideas that sparkle because they're so utterly ridiculous that even the universe itself starts to laugh. Johan and Alice Holm, two individuals who, had life been fair, would have gotten a discount on their bad decisions, found themselves with an idea so absurd that even the ghosts of Gotland raised an eyebrow.

You see, Gotland is one of those places that people talk about in whispers, mostly because the island is old enough that even the rocks have started collecting pensions. The people are as ancient as the buildings, and the buildings themselves could teach histo-

ry classes on how to fall apart with dignity. Gotland is a place where the past doesn't just linger; it stands right behind you, breathing heavily down your neck and occasionally giving you unsolicited advice on your choice of footwear.

Johan and Alice, like many couples, had a dream. It was a modest dream, modestly insane. They had recently, and somewhat impulsively, purchased a 19th-century manor on the outskirts of Visby. The sort of manor that looked like it had been designed by someone with a firm belief that windows should only be a suggestion and that the best way to show you were "living in history" was to make sure the house smelled like it.

But there was one small problem: the manor was haunted.

Now, when most people think of a haunted house, they imagine tragic ghosts, romantic, misunderstood souls of poets or lost lovers who linger, wearing ethereal expressions of melancholy. Perhaps they rattle chains dramatically or occasionally whisper in the middle of the night, but they are always tragic and usually quite graceful about their afterlife arrangements. The ghosts in Johan and Alice's manor, however, were not of the tragic, ethereal variety. No,

these ghosts were the kind of spirits who arrived five minutes late to their own funerals, grumbled about the weather, and had absolutely no understanding of how to "charm" a visitor. They were cranky, disrespectful, and, worst of all, *inconvenient.* They didn't haunt, they *hindered*. And it was that inconvenient spirit that Johan and Alice decided to invite into their lives.

But Johan and Alice, having recently realized that the only thing worse than being poor is being poor and uncreative, came up with a brilliant, if thoroughly misguided, plan. They would turn this haunted house into a bed and breakfast. They had learned that the thrill-seeking tourist market was not only lucrative but that people would pay money to be *uncomfortably* scared, particularly if it was with a side of overpriced breakfast muffins. After all, why settle for a standard B&B when you could have a haunted one?

"Think about it," Johan had said with the kind of wide-eyed optimism only a man who's never actually run a B&B could have. "The ghosts will be part of the *charm*!"

Alice, who had a more practical view of life (i.e., not based in fairy tales), had raised an eyebrow. "Are

we *sure* about this? Because the only thing I'm seeing here is that we're going to be hosting a bunch of people who want to sleep in a house where the furniture actively resents them."

Johan, ignoring the reasonable concerns of his wife, smiled in that way people do when they've already committed to an idea and are too far into it to turn back. "Alice, darling, it's going to be great. We'll have the *charm* of ghostly visitations, the *thrill* of unexplained noises in the night, and the *excitement* of waking up to find all the towels mysteriously missing."

The fact that the house was haunted in such a way that the spirits couldn't even manage to do something as simple as 'move furniture dramatically' was, in Johan's mind, a minor detail. "I mean, they're *spirits*," he argued. "What do they do all day if not haunt things?"

Alice, who had grown up in a more pragmatic world where ghosts didn't politely knock on doors before throwing things, had to admit that maybe Johan had a point. Maybe the thrill-seeking tourists would be enchanted by the idea of a haunted B&B. If there was one thing people loved, it was paying to be uncomfortable in a quaint setting. And if the house wasn't haunted in the charming way people liked,

then perhaps they could hire a few actors and give them a crash course in "how to be a scary ghost on a budget."

The next morning, they signed the papers. The house was theirs, along with all its inconveniently grumpy ghosts, who were absolutely *not* interested in playing along with any marketing campaigns.

And that, as they say, is when the true adventure began.

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But it wasn't as simple as "spooky atmosphere" and "horror-themed decor." No, no. If the ghosts were to be "part of the charm," then they needed to be given clear instructions. Johan decided to start with a "ghost orientation" meeting, which, in hindsight, was clearly a terrible idea.

"Okay, listen up!" Johan called out one chilly evening, standing at the front of the cavernous drawing room, where the ghosts gathered, grumbling into their tea cups (because ghosts drink tea, naturally). "We're going to have *guests* staying here. That means no more *shuffling aimlessly* in hallways, no more *occasional mysterious laughter* at three in the morning. We need you to be *scary*... but *also on time*."

Alice, standing in the back, was beginning to question if the *guests* weren't the only ones who would be unsettled by the arrangements. "Do you think they'll follow the rules?" she whispered.

Johan paused for a moment, glanced at the ghost of a particularly disgruntled Victorian nobleman who had, for reasons unknown, been "seated" in a rather uncomfortable armchair for the last 40 years, and nodded enthusiastically. "Oh, I'm sure they will. We've got the rules up on the wall now. And if they can't respect our guests, well, I'm not above bribing them with extra salt for their tea."

Alice sighed. "Wonderful. So, we're really opening a haunted bed and breakfast with ghosts who can't even get the *concept* of good customer service."

"Exactly!" Johan said, beaming. "I knew you'd come around."

Of course, the idea of a haunted B&B was not without its challenges. There was the small issue of the house's tendency to randomly lose power, the unsettling sound of the walls groaning in a way that seemed less atmospheric and more "this house is trying to sue us for emotional distress," and the peculiar inability of the ghosts to follow *any* of the rules. Guests

had started to arrive, though, much to Alice's dismay. It was becoming increasingly clear that not only were the ghosts out of sync with the house's *charm* but that the guests were beginning to ask increasingly difficult questions.

"How come there's a draft in the bathroom?"

"Is the ghost of a Victorian child *really* necessary?"

"Why did the chandelier just swing to the left?"

And the most pressing question of all:

"Do we get breakfast, or is that part of the haunting too?"

But Johan and Alice didn't mind. The money was rolling in, and people seemed strangely eager to pay for the privilege of being terrified by ghosts who could hardly be bothered to show up on time.

So, they carried on. After all, when life gives you a haunted house and a bad idea, the only thing to do is make it profitable.

And as for the ghosts? Well, they had plans of their own. But that, dear reader, is a story for another time.

Checking in

Johan Holm had always been a man of optimism. In fact, he was so optimistic that he often believed things could only get better, even when there was absolutely no evidence to support such a notion. It was the kind of optimism that would lead someone to start a bed and breakfast in a haunted house on Gotland, an island famous for its medieval architecture, its tragic history, and, as Johan was about to discover, an alarming number of ghosts with no respect for customer service.

As Johan stood on the front porch of the manor, the peeling paint looked like it had given up on life long ago, and the ivy was doing its best impression

of a family of vines attempting to escape through the windows. The place wasn't so much atmospheric as it was *questionable*. There were windows, sure, but you wouldn't have trusted them to open without causing a small accident. Still, Johan was nothing if not determined. The world was full of opportunities, and one could either let them pass by like an abandoned ferry or seize them with all the enthusiasm of someone who had never actually been on a ferry.

"Well," Johan said, forcing a smile, "it's certainly... atmospheric."

Alice, who had never been one for blind optimism unless it was about something practical like wine, shot him a look that could best be described as 'pre-emptively exasperated.' She didn't need to say anything. The look alone conveyed that she was already regretting the decision to accompany him on this adventure, and they hadn't even gotten past the front door yet.

"You mean it looks like the set of a horror film directed by someone who has an unhealthy hatred of happy endings?" Alice said, with the sort of dry wit that had kept their marriage alive longer than either of them expected. "Yes, it's atmospheric."

Johan grinned, unfazed by her sarcasm. "Exactly! And the best part is, the ghosts are included in the price."

Alice didn't look reassured. "Are we *sure* about this? I mean, it's one thing to be haunted by a ghost that asks you for tea, but I'm starting to think we're going to be dealing with ones that insist on *helping* with the gardening."

"That's just... that's just nonsense, Alice. Ghosts don't garden. They haunt. Terribly. And then they vanish right before you ask them to do any actual housework."

Alice raised an eyebrow. "I'll believe it when I see it."

They entered the manor, and as if on cue, the temperature dropped by a good few degrees. It wasn't the kind of subtle drop that made you think 'oh, the heating's gone off again,' but the kind that made you wonder whether you'd accidentally walked into the freezer section of a particularly sinister supermarket. The chill was immediate, like the house itself was taking a deep, resentful breath at their audacity to think it could be turned into a functioning business.

"Well, at least the ghosts are punctual," Johan muttered, looking around. "Most places are at least a little late for the whole haunting thing."

A creaky voice from behind them interrupted their banter.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" it asked, its tone the kind of low, eerie whisper that you only hear when you've wandered into a room full of people who have been dead for far too long and clearly have unresolved issues.

Alice jumped, not because she was afraid of ghosts, but because someone had snuck up on her without making any noise whatsoever, which was unnerving even by modern standards of social interaction. Turning quickly, she found herself staring at a man dressed in the kind of *unfashionably old-fashioned* clothing you could only find in a secondhand store catering exclusively to historical reenactors. His trousers looked like they'd been borrowed from someone who had once been a footman to a very bad-tempered duke in the 1800s. He had the air of someone who had never quite gotten over the idea that not being invited to a ball was a personal affront.

"We're opening a bed and breakfast," Alice said, her voice steady despite the fact that she had no idea how to respond to this. "Can we help you?"

The ghost sighed with an exaggerated, world-weary air that made Alice question just how long he'd been *dead*. "You should be asking *yourself* that question, young lady. And it's not going to be easy. You'll see."

Johan, who had been casually examining the wallpaper (which, if you could call it wallpaper, was in fact a patchwork of ancient peeling layers that were far less 'rustic charm' and far more 'the house has been in a fight with itself'), shot Alice a grin. "Well, I've always said, 'When life gives you creepy ghosts, turn it into a tourist attraction.'"

The ghost rolled its eyes, because, apparently, even in death, he had standards. "I'm not giving you advice, I'm warning you."

"Yeah, yeah," Alice said, waving her hand dismissively. "We'll make a note of that. Right after we finish painting and decorating."

The ghost looked at them in horror, as though they'd just announced their intention to launch a

reality TV show involving the disembodied spirits of *extremely* unimpressed historical figures. "You'll need more than paint and wallpaper, my dear. You'll need..."

"Yeah, we know," Alice interrupted. "A *really* big mop. Come on, Johan, let's go find the... charming... part of this place."

The ghost, as if truly affronted by her suggestion that a mop was the answer to all spiritual issues, flickered out of sight with a sound like a disgruntled sneeze. Alice, quite frankly, wasn't sure whether she was relieved or disappointed. He had been far too dramatic for someone who couldn't even commit to a full haunting.

"Well," Johan said, taking her hand with a grin, "that went well, didn't it?"

Alice looked around at the oppressive gloom of the entryway, where cobwebs had clearly been practicing their art for decades. "You mean the ghost who's clearly taken it upon himself to give unsolicited advice? Yes, it was *utterly* charming."

"See?" Johan said, completely undeterred. "I knew you'd come around. This is going to be great."

Alice, who was quite certain that 'great' wasn't exactly the adjective she'd choose, managed a half-hearted smile. "Right. 'Great' is definitely the word I'd use to describe this place. No doubt about it."

They wandered deeper into the manor, where the silence had settled like a thick fog. A faint creaking above them indicated that the ghosts weren't all on their best behaviour, but at least it wasn't *directly* in their faces. Johan turned to Alice and shrugged.

"Well, the important thing is..."

Before he could finish, there was a loud crash from upstairs. Johan, ever the optimist, winced.

"That," he said, "is probably just the ghost trying to, I don't know, *rearrange the furniture*."

"Great," Alice muttered, "because I was really hoping for a *ghost decorator*."

The adventure had truly begun.

The first customer

It turns out that there is, indeed, a market for haunted bed-and-breakfasts. The sorts of people who would otherwise have stayed in an overpriced boutique hotel with everything clean, functional, and downright boring seemed to prefer the idea of something a little more... *thrilling*. Something with history, charm, and, ideally, a ghost or two lurking in the corners, preferably ones that wouldn't murder you in your sleep but would at least throw an occasional tantrum with a few well-timed bumps and creaks. It was the thrill of *unpredictability* that made it all worthwhile. Who needed reliable plumbing when you could have a faint apparition glide across your peripheral vision every other hour?

“Can I get some feedback on this room?” Alice asked, holding up a slightly-too-big portrait of an ancestor whose expression seemed permanently confused. “Is it too... haunted?”

Johan squinted at the wall and then at the portrait, which he could have sworn was giving him an accusing look.

“Maybe just a little,” he said, as though the ghost in question had recently taken out a second mortgage on the house and was now glaring at him over unpaid debts.

“Perfect,” Alice muttered. “A haunted portrait for a haunted room. Can I do any better than this? A wallpaper that *looks* haunted? Should I sprinkle a little dust around, make it extra spooky? Really set the mood?”

At that exact moment, the front door creaked open.

“Well, it’s a bit early, but maybe it’s just the ghost trying to make its dramatic entrance,” Alice said, peering into the dimly lit foyer. “Or it could be our very first guest. Either way, I’ll grab the cobwebs.”

Johan dashed over to the door, trying not to look too excited, while Alice sighed and turned back to her

attempts at 'artistic cobweb placement.' "Please don't be an axe murderer, please don't be an axe murderer," she muttered under her breath. "A cranky tourist is fine, but I'm not ready for anything with a chainsaw."

The guest appeared. She was a tall woman, with the kind of luggage that suggested she wasn't sure if she was going for a weekend trip or was just trying to escape her entire life. It was a marvel of engineering, a suitcase, a duffel bag, and a bag that could have held a full-grown cat, all in a symphony of bright colours that clashed like an argument between a rainbow and a traffic light.

"Hello!" Johan greeted her, his voice far too chipper for anyone who had been living in what could only be described as an *exhumed* house. "I'm Johan! Welcome to our humble abode!"

The guest, whose frown seemed to have been carved by the gods themselves, nodded curtly. "I've come for the ghost tour."

Alice, still delicately arranging the cobwebs into an *almost* tasteful corner of the room, raised an eyebrow. "A ghost tour?" she muttered, looking over at Johan with a mix of disbelief and an overwhelming

urge to start drinking. "This house didn't come with a brochure. Did you make a brochure?"

"Don't be silly. We have no brochures," Johan replied, waving his hand with a slightly embarrassed shrug. "But we're offering... *an experience*!"

The guest stared at him. "An experience, huh? That's nice. An experience without Wi-Fi, I suppose? How quaint." She shifted one of her suitcases to the other hand, the sheer weight of it causing the floorboards to creak with a sound that Johan had hoped was just *dramatic* but secretly feared might be his impending doom.

"Wi-Fi?" Alice asked, raising an eyebrow in the way only a person who has spent years with Johan could. "You want Wi-Fi? This house was built before Wi-Fi was even a thing. The ghosts would throw a fit if we tried to set up a router. The last time I saw one of them near a device, it was a *spirit level*, and let me tell you, nothing ever lined up properly."

The guest blinked, clearly unimpressed. "No Wi-Fi? Well, I guess I'll be haunted *without* my Netflix, then."

"Oh, but you won't be *alone*," Johan interjected, as if this was some kind of redeeming feature. "Our

ghosts are highly sociable, and there's a very nice ghost dog who likes to sit on the foot of the bed."

The woman stared at him for a moment, then glanced at Alice, who was, for the first time, beginning to wonder if she'd made a terrible mistake.

"A ghost dog?" she asked, incredulity dripping from her voice. "You're telling me that this place not only comes with ghosts but with *pets*? Do you hand out flea collars with the room keys?"

"Well," Johan said, all smiles now, "it's actually a very *well-behaved* ghost dog. Likes to make itself known by... sitting quietly. And occasionally nudging your foot if you're not paying attention. It's a... personalized haunting experience, really."

The guest narrowed her eyes. "I see. So... no Wi-Fi, no Netflix, but a ghost dog with the subtlety of a doorbell."

"Exactly!" Johan said, clearly thrilled by how this was all going. "Now, if you'll follow me, I'll show you to your room. The ghost in there is a little more... *hands-on*, but I'm sure you'll enjoy it."

"'Hands-on'?" The woman scoffed. "Is that the *official* description of your ghost?"

"Not quite," Alice piped up from behind the cobwebs. "But you know, when a ghost is really into *decorating*, you have to give them credit for initiative. They just... *have* a vision."

The guest snorted, adjusting the various bags, which by now seemed to have developed their own gravitational pull. "Right. I'll just assume I'm about to be 'haunted' by a ghost that thinks it's on a home improvement show. But do tell me, is there a refund policy if I find that the ghost is more 'B-list' than 'A-list' material?"

Johan, never one to back down from a challenge, puffed out his chest. "Oh, our ghosts are top-tier! In fact, we've got one who could really use some audience feedback."

"Great," the guest said dryly. "Let's hope they're not as 'interactive' as your Wi-Fi setup."

With that, Johan ushered her upstairs, where the wallpaper was just spooky enough to be unsettling but not enough to actually make one reconsider their life choices. The creaking floors groaned beneath their feet like they were trying to have an opinion about everything that was happening.

As the guest entered her room, Alice turned to Johan. "You do realize we just convinced a person to spend the night in a haunted house with a ghost dog and no Wi-Fi, right?"

"Yup," Johan said proudly, "and there's a good chance she'll leave a 5-star review about the ghost dog. People love a good ghost dog."

Alice blinked, wondering if she'd just fallen into some bizarre tourist trap or had truly stumbled upon a goldmine. "Well, if the ghost dog's got an Instagram account, I'll be *very* impressed."

Johan grinned. "It's only a matter of time."

"Right," Alice muttered, "but until then, we might want to work on that Wi-Fi."

"Wi-Fi," Johan scoffed, "is so last century. What we've got here is an *experience*."

"Yeah, an experience with no Wi-Fi," Alice replied, "and *fingers crossed*, a ghost dog with a decent sense of humour."

And so it was that the first customer at Holm Manor checked in, largely unaware of the utter unpre-

dictability of her upcoming night, which was going to be a ghostly mixture of *haunting*, *cold spots* and if the ghosts had anything to say about it, perhaps a surprise petting session with the resident spectral canine.

It was, in short, the kind of place that left you asking, "What was I thinking?" right until the moment you left and realized you had, in fact, had a brilliant time.

A hauntingly good time

The grand opening of *Holm Manor Bed and Breakfast* could best be described as a classic example of the expression "never a dull moment." Or perhaps it was a *tragically* appropriate demonstration of how, if something can go wrong, it absolutely will but at least it would provide enough material for an evening's entertainment.

The first group of guests arrived with the eager anticipation of those who believe they can endure anything for the sake of a thrilling experience. They were an odd bunch, a retired schoolteacher, a pair of very enthusiastic photographers, and a guy who insisted he was "just here for the spirits" while holding a bottle of what appeared to be homemade vodka.

Johan greeted them with the sort of enthusiasm that only a man who had invested every penny into a haunted bed-and-breakfast could muster. "Welcome! Welcome! To Holm Manor!" he said, extending his arms as if unveiling the Taj Mahal. "It's a place of history, charm, and of course, ghostly encounters. Can I interest you in a tour of the haunted halls before you settle in?"

The schoolteacher squinted at the walls, as though searching for answers in the peeling wallpaper. "I'll pass on the tour," she said, "but I'll gladly take a look at your library. Anything with a ghost in it is bound to have an interesting story."

"Absolutely! You'll find the ghost of a librarian who *refuses* to let anyone borrow books," Johan said cheerfully. "She'll haunt you for hours with her opinions on late fees."

The photographers were busy photographing the creaky staircase, which was evidently *the* most photogenic spot in the house. They looked positively thrilled at the idea of capturing "atmosphere," which, to be honest, was a bit like capturing an atmosphere of soggy bread. But it was their money, so Johan wasn't going to complain.

And then, of course, there was the vodka guy. His name was Gregor, and Gregor was here to get what he had paid for. Which, judging by the amount of homemade liquor he was carrying, was a combination of cheap thrills and even cheaper alcohol.

"I'm here for the full experience," Gregor announced loudly, holding up his bottle like it was the Holy Grail. "Ghosts or no ghosts, I came for the ambiance. And maybe a haunting or two."

Alice, who had been watching the arrival with the interest of someone who'd been in this situation far too many times, gave Gregor an unamused look. "You came here for ambiance?" she asked, her arms crossed. "You know what we're offering, right? We've got restless spirits, unscheduled poltergeist activity, and a child ghost who steals blankets off unsuspecting guests. And that's just *on the first night*."

Gregor took a swig of his vodka, unfazed. "Sounds like just the kind of vacation I need."

And with that, Johan ushered them upstairs, all the while muttering things like, "And this room's haunted by a ghost who *hates* floral prints," and, "Watch out for the attic, it's got a *temperamental* poltergeist

who can't figure out how to work the doorbell, so he just throws things around."

Alice, meanwhile, was standing in the middle of the foyer, assessing the scene. The house seemed to hum with a strange sort of *excitement* or maybe it was just the floorboards groaning under the strain of the building's ongoing existential crisis. Either way, she was starting to feel a little less optimistic.

"Okay, Johan," she said, arms crossed, "We've got guests. We've got a haunted house. We've got poltergeists who can't seem to pick a side in the battle between *bothering people* and *being useful*... What could possibly go wrong?"

Johan grinned. "What could go wrong? Nothing! This is going to be the best business venture since sliced bread. And who doesn't like a good ghost story with a side of breakfast?"

That night, things started to get a bit... *lively*.

It began innocently enough with a few knocks at the door. It wasn't unusual for a ghost to make their presence known with a light *tap-tap-tap*, but this particular ghost, a child who seemed to have a rather mischievous streak, was apparently a fan of dramatic

entrances. Johan had tried to warn the guests, but you know how it is, telling people that a ghost might pull off their blankets in the middle of the night doesn't exactly *sell* the experience.

Around 2 a.m., the first screams began.

"Did you hear that?" Alice asked, half asleep, from the kitchen. She had heard the sharp *slam* of a door, followed by a rapid *scurrying* sound. It wasn't the sound of a ghost, it was the sound of something trying *too hard* to be a ghost.

Johan, who was sitting on the couch in his pyjamas, looking unreasonably cheerful, peered into the kitchen with a slight frown. "Yep. That's our Victorian child ghost. She's very… hands-on. Likes to *steal* blankets. It's not exactly *polite*, but it's... entertaining."

"I don't find it entertaining when people start screaming at 2 a.m.!" Alice said, rubbing her eyes and picking up a towel to dry a cup that had somehow gotten *wet* despite not being near any water.

"You know what they say," Johan replied with a grin, "Screaming guests are *happy* guests."

The next morning, the schoolteacher came downstairs with a face that could've curdled milk. She

looked *worse* than the portraits on the wall, which, to be fair, was saying something.

"Alice," the teacher began, "I need to speak to you about the ghost. That child… I swear she pulled my blanket off in the middle of the night. And then there was... *rummaging* in the drawers!"

"Rummaging?" Alice repeated, arching an eyebrow. "Well, at least she's resourceful. Not many ghosts would think to look for spare towels in the middle of a haunting."

The teacher shot her a glare that could've soured wine. "You find this funny?"

"Oh, absolutely," Alice replied, trying to stifle a laugh. "It's not every day you get your blankets stolen by a Victorian child ghost with *no sense of boundaries*. It's charming."

Meanwhile, Johan was in the kitchen, cheerfully assembling what looked like a slightly-too-large breakfast buffet. "And did everyone try the scrambled eggs? We serve them with a hint of..."

"I swear, if your ghost makes any more *noises* tonight, I will leave a *bad* review," the schoolteacher interrupted.

"Oh, don't worry," Johan said, flashing a grin, "You won't have to *leave* a bad review. The ghosts will make sure you *never leave* the house at all. It's in the *fine print*."

The schoolteacher went a bit pale at that, and Alice watched the whole interaction with the amusement of someone who'd seen it all before.

"See?" Johan said, as he handed her a tray of pancakes. "People *love* our ghosts. They might scream a little, but they *come back* for more. That's the *key* to a successful business model."

Alice stared at him for a long moment, then looked out the window at the weathered sign that read: *Holm Manor Bed and Breakfast: Where the Spirits Never Rest*.

"Yeah," she said slowly, "I think you might be onto something."

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And so, with a truly hauntingly *good* time, the couple found themselves entangled in their own eccentric little slice of tourism, a bizarre world of restless spirits, cranky children with a penchant for blanket

theft, and guests who were both thoroughly *delighted* and mildly terrified.

And that, as any good entrepreneur will tell you, is how to run a bed-and-breakfast.

The unravelling

It had been an eventful few weeks for the Holm Manor Bed and Breakfast. And by "eventful," one could also mean "chaotic," "completely beyond any reasonable expectation," and if we're being generous, "incredibly entertaining for anyone watching." Johan and Alice had, rather astoundingly, managed to turn their haunted house into a roaring success, in that unique way that only a truly bizarre business venture could.

As the weeks passed, the ghostly activity grew more intense. At first, it had been the usual haunting fare: unexplained noises, doors creaking open for no dis-

cernible reason, and the occasional flicker of candlelight that seemed to have a life of its own. But soon, the house became far more proactive in its ethereal endeavours.

It began with objects moving ...usually just little things, like teaspoons, a book left on the mantle, or an old hat. It was *always* an old hat, for reasons no one could quite explain, but Johan liked to pretend it was the ghost of a fashion critic. Alice, however, had the sinking suspicion that perhaps the hats weren't as benign as they seemed.

"Johan," Alice said one evening, as she caught him admiring the way the hats were gently floating across the room, "do you really think it's a *fashion critic* ghost?"

"Absolutely," Johan replied, his tone casual as he watched a top hat make its way to the chandelier and dangle like an overenthusiastic puppet. "I mean, have you seen the wallpaper in here? The ghost clearly has standards. He's been calling it 'pale beige with a hint of existential crisis.'"

"Wait. Are you telling me," Alice said, her voice dangerously calm, "that our ghost is *mocking* us about our taste in décor?"

Johan gave her a pointed look. "Mocking is a bit harsh. I'd say 'constructive criticism' with a *personal* touch. He's really quite the expert. He actually told me, in one of his more forceful possessions, that we should *reconsider* the curtains."

"Of course he did," Alice said, rubbing her temples. "Because if there's one thing I was *really* hoping to hear from a ghost, it was a critique on the curtains."

"Well, maybe you could *listen* more carefully. He also said the lighting was 'ambiguous.'"

Alice paused. "Ambiguous lighting?"

"Yes! You know, the kind of lighting that makes you think you're in a murder mystery, but then you realize the *murder* was the lighting choice itself."

Alice was silent for a moment, before muttering under her breath, "I'm going to start charging extra for this. Ghosts are no longer free."

It was at this moment that the next part of the haunting began, and frankly, this one wasn't just spooky, it was a bit *unsettling*.

The ghosts started asking for tea.

It was an innocent enough request at first, an "excuse me, could I possibly get a cup of tea?" in a voice that sounded like a polite invitation to afternoon tea, rather than the wailing echo of some Victorian ectoplasmic entity. But as the weeks passed, the requests became… *more specific*.

"Johan," Alice said one afternoon, as she found herself standing at the kettle, "why is it that every time I make tea, I feel like someone is *hovering* behind me? And not in a nice, 'I'm watching you make tea' kind of way, but more of a, 'You better be making Earl Grey, because that's what the ghost *specifically* requested' way?"

"Maybe they've developed a preference," Johan said, as though this was the most normal thing in the world. "A sort of... ethereal tea sommelier situation."

"A *tea sommelier*?" Alice echoed, incredulous. "Of course. Naturally. Ghosts just *love* a good cup of tea with a side of moral ambiguity and unfinished business."

"Don't be so cynical," Johan replied, grinning. "There's something quite nice about a ghost who's *polite* enough to ask for a hot beverage. Just imagine if they were more... aggressive."

Alice paused, thinking for a moment. "I'm not sure 'aggressive' is worse than 'passive-aggressive.' I mean, at least if they were aggressive, they'd just throw the kettle at my head and be done with it."

"True," Johan said thoughtfully, "but have you considered how bad a *spirit* could be at making tea? The last thing we need is a ghost who insists on loose-leaf tea and *whispers* about how 'too many bags ruin the flavour.'"

Alice shuddered. "I'm going to need a drink."

And speaking of drinks, that was when the next *truly bizarre* development occurred.

It was a Thursday evening, which meant the two of them were casually going about their usual post-dinner cleanup routine, when a peculiar sound began emanating from the dining room. It started as a low *creaking*, as though an old chair were being dragged across the floor. Then, inexplicably, a glass *floated* off the table and made its way towards the sink.

"Johan," Alice said slowly, her eyes narrowing, "did you teach the ghosts how to *do dishes*?"

"Well, no," Johan admitted, with a sheepish look, "but I did tell them we were running a *hospitality*

business, not a *haunting* business. Maybe they think they're helping?"

"By doing *dishes*?" Alice's voice was thin with disbelief. "That's a new level of haunting. 'You'll never escape the wrath of the poltergeist who *washes your dishes* too thoroughly!'"

"Hey, it's either that, or they keep moving the furniture," Johan pointed out. "At least they're trying to be useful."

"And they're doing a *terrible* job of it," Alice said, eyes flicking towards the kitchen, where the glass was now attempting to wash itself. "Honestly, I'm starting to wonder if they're trying to *run* the place themselves."

But that was when they both heard it, the unmistakable sound of a *possessed umbrella*.

"Not again," Alice groaned, as she stood from her chair. "Are we *really* doing this? Are we letting the ghosts possess *objects* now? What's next, a possessed broomstick that gives *self-improvement advice*?"

And so it was that the Holm Manor Bed and Breakfast took a new turn. Guests arrived in droves, but not for the haunted house experience they were

expecting. No, they came to witness the increasing madness. They came to hear about the ghosts that *critique wallpaper* and *do dishes.* They came because they had *questions.*

And every guest had an opinion.

At breakfast the next morning, the retired schoolteacher, whose presence at the manor had become a staple of sorts, raised an eyebrow over her coffee. "So," she said, very seriously, "what exactly is your plan here? I mean, I've been to some strange places in my time, but this... this is something else entirely."

Alice took a deep breath and leaned across the table. "Honestly? I'm thinking of charging extra for the ghost critiques. It's practically *fine dining* at this point."

Johan nodded solemnly. "And maybe we should start a 'special ghost services' menu. You know, a ghost who can help with unpacking, another who does the dishes, and perhaps a particularly *critical* one who can rate your fashion choices."

The schoolteacher considered this for a moment, then raised her cup of coffee in silent salute. "Well, at least it's *unique*."

"You have no idea," Alice muttered, rubbing her forehead. "At this rate, we're going to need a ghost *consultant*."

Johan looked thoughtful. "I'll put that on the website."

And so, with their ghosts *settling in* even more comfortably than expected, the Holm Manor Bed and Breakfast continued to thrive, much to the confusion of the outside world and the increasing bewilderment of its owners.

It wasn't quite what they'd planned. But, then again, when had anything ever gone according to plan?

The end ...for now.

The Visby haunting

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The Visby haunting

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From basement saunas to IKEA divorces,
Swedish hell is the other people.